

SONOMA DEVELOPMENT CENTER
15000 Arnold Drive
Eldridge
Sonoma County
California

HALS CA-26
CA-26

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN LANDSCAPES SURVEY
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240-0001

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SONOMA DEVELOPMENTAL CENTER

HALS NO. CA-26

Location: 15000 Arnold Drive, Eldridge, Sonoma County, CA
Lat: 38.34639 Long: -122.52114

Significance: The Sonoma Developmental Center is an excellent representation of hospital grounds designed for the care of the developmentally delayed and disabled, from the 1800s to the current time, and appears to meet Criterion A for the National Register (the property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history). The early hospital, known as the State Home for Feeble Minded Children, was the first of its kind in the state.

The approach to the care of the developmentally delayed and of physically and mentally handicapped people has advanced, and the landscape reflects that history. The campus clearly displays, in many subtle and overt ways, the evolution of society's approach to providing care. The original campus was planned and built in a time when fresh air and calm surroundings were first considered beneficial to good health. It appears that there was also a time when the main campus was organized in an orderly, cohesive, and controlled manner. Later site planning and buildings from the late 1950s and early 1960s are strong and attractive expressions of their own era. The outdoor areas lack the intimate and homey scale of older parts of campus, and the buildings were, undoubtedly, consciously skewed to the layout of the older parts of the campus as a reflection of the era when experimentation and throwing off old ways was the tenor of the times.

History: Originally 1670 acres in size, the land was purchased in 1889 for an expanded California Home for the Care and Training of the Home for Feeble Minded. The Home was operating in Santa Clara at that time, and Captain Oliver Eldridge and George Gibbs were asked to find a new site. The cornerstone for the main building was laid on November 19, 1890. Approximately 140 residents arrived by train in November of 1891. By 1895 a post office was needed; it was named for Captain Eldridge, and the site location became known as Eldridge. In 1906 much of the main building was destroyed by earthquake; a new building incorporating portions of the old one was opened in 1908. In 1909 the name of the facility was changed to Sonoma State Home.

The Home grew rapidly, and care was extended to adults as well as children. Buildings have been added every decade up through the 1990s, with major expansions or alterations occurring in the 1920s through the early 1930s, and again in the late 1950s and early 1960s. In 1953 the name of the facility was changed to Sonoma State Hospital. As a reflection of developments regarding

therapeutic services and care, the interiors of the living units were extensively renovated in the late 1970 and early 1980s. In 1985 the current name, Sonoma Developmental Center, became official.

Decription: The Sonoma Developmental Center, approximately 1000 acres in size, is located in Sonoma County, south of the town of Glen Ellen and about 50 miles north of San Francisco. The site is nestled in a valley between two ranges of low coastal mountains. The land slopes gently up Sonoma Creek towards the base of the mountains, thereafter the land rises steadily. The hillsides support a rich, naturally occurring variety of native plants, including oaks, buckeye, and Manzanita. Sonoma Creek travels roughly north/south through the site; most of the main campus is located west of the creek. (For the purposes of this report, Arnold Drive and Sonoma Creek are referred to as though on a north/south axis through the site and descriptions are referenced with this idea.) Jack London State Historic Park abuts the Center grounds to the northwest. 670 acres were transferred from the Center to State Parks and to Sonoma County Regional Parks in the recent past.

Arnold Drive, a main route used in the county, is generally a north/south route but veers somewhat northwest through the Center's locations. Arnold Drive bisects the hospital grounds and the Center roads are oriented to the drive. Arnold Drive is rural to semi-rural much of its length; the immediate approaches to the Center are fairly rural; the landscaped and carefully maintained, campus-like character of the site is a contrast.

The character of the site is somewhat formal with an overlay of rustic and casual informality. The formal elements are the orthogonal layout of most of the main campus, reinforced by the formal plantings of trees that exist, in whole or in part, on the major thoroughfares. Period revival styles were used for many buildings, lending a casual and homey appearance to the place. Building setbacks are generally consistent, reinforcing the generously landscaped but orderly character of the site. It is generally the case that curving or non-orthogonal roads are located at the edges of the main campus, and are in association with creek areas. Large growing trees are planted throughout the site, creating a strong repetitive vertical element in the landscape and a dense tree canopy in many parts of the site.

A United States Geological Survey (USGS) map from 1980 shows a strongly orthogonal layout for the main campus, the only deviations occurring at the creeks and at the western edge of the Center where the topography becomes moderately steep. On the west edge of the campus, Orchard Road leads up into the mountain; water tanks, Fern Lake, a picnic area, a cemetery and old orchard are located along the Road. The orchard and picnic area are at the western reaches of the site and are located about 800 feet above the main campus.

To the east, groups of buildings are located between Arnold Drive and Sonoma Creek. A bridge over the creek leads to additional buildings; this area is reserved

mostly for residential use. Railroad Street marks the eastern edge of the main part of the campus. Beyond Railroad Street there is a farm area with several farm buildings and a small number of houses, beyond which are located some water tanks and Lake Suttonfield. The lake is located about 150 feet above the main campus.

Arnold Drive, through the main part of the Center grounds, has been planted with regularly-spaced, large-growing pin oaks. These oaks are the legacy of Superintendent Fred Butler, who served from 1915 to 1949. Structures are cohesive in their character, spacing, and size, and are all set back from Arnold Drive with lawns, shrubs, and additional trees. Some buildings lining Arnold Drive appear to be single-family residences, suggesting an intimate scale to the structures within the grounds. The overall effect is remarkable for its tranquil, shaded, and verdant character.

Harney Avenue is the main entry point into the Center. It crosses Arnold Drive at right angles and is the main approach to the administrative part of the site. The historic Main Building, now vacant but still known as the Professional Education Center (P.E.C.), is the oldest institutional building on the site (1908) and is dramatically located on axis with the parkway and commands the view of those entering the site. (This building is on the National Register of Historic Places.) Along with the appearance of Arnold Drive through the Center, the relationship of the Main Building to the road sets up the character of the site. This western section of Harney Avenue is split by a generous parkway which is planted with pairs of palms alternating with pairs of pollarded sycamores. This very strong entry statement is clearly visible on a 1910 postcard; now the pattern is not quite complete since some palms are missing. It appears that the opposite sides of the street may have been planted with regularly spaced gingko trees, some trees remain on the northern side of the street.

The intersection with Arnold is marked with large stone columns, stone planter/seal walls, and a rustic-style, stone bus shelter. The gates and walls are visible in a 1910 postcard, the bus shelter location is out of view of the camera, but it is stylistically compatible with the columns and walls and may date from the same period of construction. This style is very sympathetic to the historic-revival architecture styles used throughout the site.

Building in a mix of styles line this section of Harney; the southern section is notable for its expansive lawns that end at the backs of the school and gym, which are entered from the adjoining street (Wilson Street). These buildings are of relatively recent origin (1960). The 1954 USGS map indicates a different building on the south side of Harney. It is likely that the older building reinforced the formal nature of the entry to the site; the relationship of that building to the street was probably as strong as that of the 1929 Chamberlain Building on the north side

of the street. The two-story Chamberlain building faces onto Harney and shares a similar setback as other older buildings throughout the site.

Harney Avenue ends to the west at Sonoma Street; Sonoma Street parallels Arnold Drive. Each end of Sonoma Street is marked with a strong axial element; the northern end with a large building (Wagner) and the southern end with a group of buildings clustered around a lawn (Walnut and Hatch). The 1954 map indicates a building opposite Hatch, that site is now occupied by a metal temporary building. Remnant formal tree plantings mark the street; it appears that ginkgo trees once lined some sections of the street. Holt Street displays strong formal trees plantings; the parking strip is planted regularly, both sides of the street, with sycamore trees. The lower section of Wilson Street is notable for the majestic oak trees. A seasonal creek/drainage way occurs on the northern side of lower Wilson Street and the casual character of this area, which contains several large oaks, blends into the nearby more manicured landscapes, to great effect.

Sonoma House, once the Superintendent's home that has been converted to an event space, dates from 1897. Vehicles, and presumably most visitors, approach the building from the west side of the house; this main approach does not correspond well to the siting of the house. A relatively narrow path with a more direct approach to the main entrance of the house is accessed from the side of the 1932 fire department building, which suggests that access to the building has changed over the years. Remnants of more formal landscapes are evident, including sections of hedge to the east, and paths, steps, and there are several elements (portions of paths and low walls) that suggest a formal garden was located to the west of the Sonoma House. An old moss-covered stone fireplace and seating area is located south of the building next to an accessory building.

The western edge of the main campus is used for utilitarian purposes. Eucalyptus and Toyon Streets provide access to laundry, paint, and other support services. Manzanita features support services buildings and storage structures that are built into the hillside, using the steepness of the site as an advantage. The Carpenter Shop, one of the westernmost buildings on the main campus, has acquired an extra driveway to the south, an example of an incremental landscape; it was clearly not designed as a driveway, but needs outweighed whatever original plan limited a drive to the north side. A rare example of a "desire" path, created simply by people passing over the same area for years, occurs north of the paint shop. It is notable since it is rare on the site, pointing to the successful way pedestrian passageways were designed through most of the site. The entire area where the shops, maintenance, and other support services is located, is a working landscape. The perimeter of many buildings is used as additional storage and work places; asphalt, concrete, or packed earth are the predominant landscape materials.

Stone retaining walls, stone steps, and concrete steps occur throughout the western area of the main campus. A stone-lined drainage ditch occurs throughout

the steeper portions of the site, in conjunction with the support services areas and on into the main campus areas. Stone lined ditches are visible near the Blue Rose, north of the Main Kitchen, and to the west of Dunbar and Wagner, evidence of an old but carefully worked out and aesthetically pleasing drainage system. This system appears to be in working order in many places, but some spots do show evidence of wall failure.

Eucalyptus continues to north up a hill to a cluster of buildings that once provided housing for residents. These buildings are currently used for support services, such as upholstery and adaptive technology. The main buildings, Parton and Goodard, have large asphalt and concrete courtyards that were further enclosed by chain link. Now the courtyards are used for working and storage spaces; in fact, the Goodard courtyard is full of large storage containers; it is an example of an accidental landscape. The east side of the buildings was originally the front entrance. According to a former client, there may have been a set of stairs down the hillside from this site, but there is no obvious evidence of a stairway (from Karen Litzenburg, assistant to the executive director of the center). Currently the crest of the hill on this side is marked by a low concrete wall that appears to have once been a location for some type of metal fence. No particular attention is paid to the landscaping in this area; clearly resources are focused on the areas the clients use.

Orchard Road, reached from Eucalyptus or Manzanita, winds up the mountain, past the corporation yard and the cemetery, past the water treatment plant and Fern Lake, and on to the orchard and Camp Via. Much of this road is stone-lined; some sections of the wall are at least four feet high. The cemetery is marked by stone columns and a double iron gate. (The cemetery has not been used since 1962). The camp area has a layout that appears haphazard. There are some concrete paths and several small, concrete block buildings for communal use. The extensive orchard is very near the picnic area. It is no longer tended, but still bears fruit.

The main campus is marked to the south by a bridge over Sonoma Creek. Beyond the bridge the character of the site reverts to the semi-rural character of the surrounding countryside; houses belonging to the Center are located west of Arnold Drive along this section of road.

Harney Road provides access to the predominantly residential, east side of the grounds. The character of this area is less formal due to the effect of the riparian corridor associated with Sonoma Creek, the lack of formal tree plantings, the lack of axis structures placed at ends of thoroughfares, and the fact that in the northeast and southwest portions of the area are large buildings at non-orthogonal angles. Buildings on the east side are less various. With a few exceptions, they are characterized by generous front lawns, large trees, and enclosed back or side patios for client use. "Temporary" or "accidental" landscapes occur here with large metal awnings.

A 1910 postcard image shows that portions of the east side of Arnold Drive were once orchards, it seems that the use of this area for care and residential use began about during expansions in the 1940s. The oldest Center buildings east of Arnold Drive, with the exception of the farm area, date from 1948. More than half the buildings in this area are from 1956 and later.

A simple bridge with concrete walls and tube steel rails crosses Sonoma Creek and leads on to the farm area. (The farm area has been excluded from this documentation, but is worthy of future documentation.) Some distance past the use area, Harney Avenue ends near Lake Suttonfield.

ADDITIONAL LANDSCAPE ELEMENTS

Major street tree plantings are large-growing trees and are generally deciduous trees. Coniferous trees also occur throughout the grounds and include redwoods, firs, pines and cedars. Old photographs, postcards and references to planting shade trees and planting trees along new “avenues” in the 1890s era The Institution Bulletin clearly indicate an early commitment to the landscape of the grounds. Dr. Fred O. Butler, during his tenure as superintendant from 1915 to 1949, renewed this commitment by adding many shrubs and trees to the site. Small-scale plantings are generally not contributors to the character of the site. From historic photos and from some evidence on the ground, shrubs and other small-scale plants once played a larger role in the appearance of the landscape. Old photographs and postcards indicated that, along with large-growing trees, the land in front of buildings was often planted extensively with shrubs and perennials. This landscape treatment is labor intensive and may not have lasted more than a decade or two. Classic, old, garden shrubs still occur in conjunction with some of the older buildings; for instance, myrtle (*Myrtus communis*) Euonymus, Cotoneaster, laurels (*Prunus* spp.) and spiraeas all occur throughout the landscaped areas. Several old fig trees are on site behind buildings. Since there is little fencing on the site, the presence of deer is a limiting factor in plant variety. More modern buildings, from the 1950s on, generally display simple plantings; the lawn and trees typical of the main campus, and a scattering of shrubs, such as heavenly bamboo (*Nandina* spp) near the building. Plantings at buildings Parmalee and Powers also display lineal hedges that repeat the horizontal character of the buildings, a common device of the era.

In recent years, the staff and clientele are responsible for a number of modifications to the landscapes, such as the inclusion of large prefabricated metal canopies and storage structures, and modifications to patios. These elements are usually not sympathetic to the architectural expression of the buildings. In some cases, they are quite destructive to a space that was, in all likelihood, designed as an expression of peace and harmony, such as the entry courtyard space at the Wright building. Here asphalt is the dominant ground treatment, which was not

the original treatment for the space. Round stone planters were arranged symmetrically many years ago as part of a larger expression of space; planters have cracked and one of the trees is missing. A temporary wood storage structure fills the center of the space. Someone has placed several trees in wooden nursery planters along the concrete entrance pathway, possibly in reaction to the harshness of the courtyard. It is not known if the courtyard was originally modified as a result of budget considerations or as an attempt to meet a need. Another good example is the patio created from modular concrete and wood elements that is located behind Wagner. Clearly the landscape was not meeting the current needs of the clients and staff and someone took it in hand to create the new patio space, which has a homemade, but almost temporary look that is at odds with the craft of the building.

Sidewalks exist throughout the grounds, and adjoin most roads, creating an environment where walking is safe. Pathways also connect buildings across lawn areas. Most pathways are of concrete; some are brick. Most concrete pathways leading to period-revival buildings are about 30" wide; sometimes these are scored to resemble flagstone patterns, a technique typical of the era. More recent buildings have wider pathways of varying widths.

Concrete elements include cast-concrete street markers (an example is at Wilson Street and Arnold Drive). There are concrete retaining walls around Manzanita and Wilson Streets, at Ordahl/Johnson and Emparan/Regamay. A very large retaining wall occurs at Nelson alongside Arnold Drive. Substantial square and round concrete markers, which appear to be from the early part of the 20th century, occur across from the fire station and McDougall building. A concrete path, laid out east and west next to these markers, connects to a pathway and set of stairs that leads to the police station. The arrangement of steps and stairs provides a glimpse into the orderly approach that was taken in laying out the pedestrian pathways.

Chain link occurs throughout the site. It is often used to enclose courtyards associated with clients' residences. These courtyard areas appear to be heavily used by the clients and have been modified to suit that purpose. Each contains a large, flat, metal canopy with picnic tables underneath, moveable and fixed planters, a variety of benches, and many other objects. Some courtyards contain tree wells and other, minimal planting areas, particularly in older residential buildings that are no longer in use. The paving in these areas is usually a mix of concrete and asphalt.

Concrete block walls also occur on the site. There is a section of block retaining wall behind Hatch building, bracketed by stone retaining walls. A low concrete block wall occurs at Residential Building 141. Rectangular concrete blocks partially enclose a section of the Nelson and James courtyards. A decorative concrete block storage structure also occurs at the Nelson courtyard, and a section

of decorative concrete block wall partially screens a delivery area of the Nelson building. Rectangular concrete blocks combined with clay pipes enclose the northern grounds of Oak Valley School.

In addition to the stone elements described above, there are additional stone elements, such as curved walls on Wilson Street, a stone path over the seasonal waterway across from Oak Valley School, stone barbecues at the Sonoma House and Residence 141, and stone retaining walls and ditches at Acacia Court II.

Green-painted cast-iron street lamps are used throughout the site and are mixed with cobra-head style lamps in some places. Cobra-head lamps occur on Wilson Street, along Arnold Drive, and in scattered locations throughout the site.

Residence 146 contains several old landscape elements or remnants, including metal clothesline poles, round tube-steel handrails, part of a very low retaining wall alongside the path to the garage, a low, painted picket fence, a wood fence with wire infill, a brick retaining wall to keep the basement foundation dry, and a single-stone high planter edge is accompanied by a failing lattice fence. A wood pedestrian bridge of recent construction occurs near Sonoma Creek and Harney Avenue. Wood fences enclose several guest or employee residences, including: Residences number 136 and 137.

Outdoor furnishings: A simple split-form, cast concrete bench in the Nelson courtyard probably dates from the period of construction. A pair of plastic and steel benches is located at the entry to Oak Valley School and may date when the school was constructed. Another example of outdoor furniture is a swing whose supports are created through the use of round steel formed into a pair of circles that are joined at the top. A wood platform anchors that base and a wood swing is suspended inside the circles by chain. There are a handful of these charming and unusual swings throughout the site. (Outdoor furnishings occur throughout the site in great variety; documenting the entire range of those resources is outside the scope of this report.)

Various landscape elements, half-hidden by plant growth, occur throughout the perimeter of the site. Sometimes the use of the element or object is not immediately obvious. In some cases, such as a spot just south of the carpenter shop, there are the remains of architectural elements that might be the locations for long-gone structures. Further investigation of these unidentified elements and objects is outside the scope of this report.

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Note: California State Archives contains additional photographs not accessed for this report that are listed under Mental Hygiene.

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The main entrance to the Sonoma Developmental Center, showing the historic stone entry posts, tree plantings, and the National Register-listed Main Building at the terminus of Harney Circle. This entry and Arnold Street, perpendicular to it and shown in the photo, display the strong formal character of the main entry approaches (Janet Gracyk, June 26, 2008).



A characteristic cottage is displayed on the right with mature trees, generous lawns, and the residential scale and informal character that was used throughout the resident areas in the 1920s and 1930s (Janet Gracyk, June 3, 2008).